



God, Who Overcomes by Bonnie Doebley

Bonnie is a former Board member of Transforming Congregations. She leads "Out of the Depths," an Exodus International member ministry.



I'm not sure how old I was when the word homosexual was added to my vocabulary, or at what age I first became aware that I was different from my peers. But by the time I was 12, I realized I definitely had a problem.

I felt comfortable with boys, but did not look to them for affection. At 13, I thought I was in love with one of my girlfriends. Even though I suffered a great deal of mental anguish over my feelings, I would not seek help. I went to a sleep-over with a close friend, and as she slept, I caressed her. I experienced a great deal of guilt, and confusion. Our contact became more physical as time went on, but I was too afraid of rejection to act out as much as I'd wanted. The closeness felt good, but I was embarrassed that being affectionate was so sexually arousing. I hated myself, yet I could not stop touching her, and longed for more. She and her family moved out of town, ending our relationship before we actually

engaged in sexual behavior.

I was raised in the church, winning prizes for memorizing scripture. During confirmation class, I decided I'd become a missionary, and thus make up to God for being so bad. If I could work for the church, I would not sin so much, or so went my 13-year-old thinking.

My parents loved me, but I did not feel comfortable confiding in them. I thought my mother would punish me, that she would be hurt and ashamed of me. No one could understand, so I carried the burden alone. Instead of dating like my classmates, I volunteered to visit church shut-ins, to serve at church dinners. Saturday nights found me alone in my room praying and reading Psalm 51, David's Psalm of repentance, over and over, begging God not to condemn me to Hell for feelings I did not choose, and felt helpless to control.

During my junior year of high school, I met a young lady at an interfaith retreat. She was a lot of fun, and a close relationship developed. Within three months, we were engaged in sexual behavior. I had never become so intimate with anyone before. It was like a drug, and I needed more and more time with her, greater amounts of stimulation to feel satisfied. I knew it was wrong. I spoke with my pastor about it, but I could not stop. Nor was I honest, since we had to be secretive about the nature of our relationship. I pretended to be straight, and to be religious, but that just added to my self-contempt. I hated this part of myself yet I felt that I could not survive without it. I wanted to love God, but felt no love from Him. My lover and I continued our relationship until I graduated and headed off to college. I had every intent of "marrying" her after completing my education.

Maybe once we made a lifetime commitment to each other, the guilt would go away. If I were a man, at least our love could have been legitimate, but there was no way to find acceptance as things were.

God had other plans for me. I became involved on campus with IntersVarsity Christian Fellowship. The friendliness and kindness of the members eased my loneliness. We discussed our beliefs, and even though I knew the Bible well, and had a good grasp of the Christian faith, I had not come to Jesus as Lord. I wanted to recognize him as Savior, but I could not ask him to be Lord of my life. I was a pervert and I could not believe that God would want anything to do with me.

One of the members asked me directly why I would not make a commitment, and I shamefully disclosed my problems with my sexual orientation. She made it clear that God had already sent Jesus to die for us, and that he loved us no matter what we had done, or what kind of problems we faced. She suggested that I tell God honestly, how I felt, and ask him to handle the situation. So, arrogantly, I came to God, the Almighty, daring him to do something with the mess that my life had become! Fortunately, he accepted my terms and came into my heart. Not much changed, I felt the same, but I knew I wanted to love Him as He loved me.

I never asked God to just take these feelings away. Although hurtful, they served some purpose in my life. The fantasies were a familiar place to which I could retreat when overwhelmed by life's stress. It was comforting to lie in a woman's arms, or at least to think about it. Like a substance abuser who resorts to his addiction to escape the pain in his life, lesbian thoughts were my addiction.

I did not act out sexually with a woman again, although I thought about it. I continued to have lesbian fantasies. There was still confusion about my identity, and what kind of life I would lead, but God continued to work.

By my senior year of college, I met a man who is now my husband of 21 years. I believe God brought us together. I did not tell him of my past because I was not acting out, and I intended on being faithful to him, even though the lesbian feelings were still there from time to time. I loved him and expected the marriage would solve a lot of my problems.

We had a son, bought a home, and we financed two cars. It was a childhood dream come true. Yet, I became unhappy. Although my husband and I did not fight, the relationship was shallow. We did not share our deepest thoughts and feelings. I did not know how to open up to him, but he did not seem discontent, he seemed quite happy.

About five years ago, I had to deal with my lesbian feelings as I had never done before. I had lived with them for a long time, but I had not taken a serious look at where these tendencies came from. I don't believe it was a conscious decision on my part to choose these feelings. It was my choice, however, to act on them. One of my coworkers was an affectionate, caring person. I spent time sharing with her, and I felt a strong attraction to her. She treated me differently than other women. I felt special when I was with her, but I developed sexual feelings for her. I went to her home and asked how she felt about me, even though I did not want to leave my husband, or destroy my relationship with God. But I could not tolerate the way I felt. She said that she cared about me, but that she did not want a sexual relationship. I fell apart. I felt rejected and ashamed, yet in a way, relieved by her answer.

I cried often and became very depressed. I saw her daily at work. My husband noticed my behavior and I had to tell him of my past and what had occurred. I needed help, and I knew I needed him to be a part of my healing. I was so glad he did not leave me, or respond in some hurtful way. He forgave me, and he has continued to be supportive in my journey toward wholeness.

I entered therapy because I could not cope with my feelings nor concentrate at work. I could not function very well at home, as I was very distracted by the inner turmoil. I spoke with my pastor who referred me to a counselor. Through therapy, I came to understand some of the reasons for my lesbian feelings. I have reaffirmed that I will not act out on those feelings. There has been a great deal of pain, as I have faced ghosts from the past that fashioned my personality, that planted the seeds of my sexual confusion. I have had to face and accept things about myself I do not like, but God has been with me through it all. He has led me to the right therapists; he has put people in my life to encourage me, and who have helped in my recovery.

I no longer hate myself. I am more open and honest with my husband, and more certain of his love for me. I am not people-pleasing all the time, nor ashamed of myself. I have found freedom in Christ Jesus. By his power, I have been saved, and by the Holy Spirit's leading, I will continue to grow in faith, and to become the woman God wants me to be. I thank Him and praise him for reaching into the deepest darkness of my soul and shining his perfect light. I rejoice that he has put his nail pierced hands over my wounds, and soothed them, so they can heal.

I realize that I do not choose my feelings. God holds me responsible for how I behave. My sexual orientation is not who I am. - I am a child of God, but I happen to struggle with attraction toward my own gender from time to time. I do not need to hate myself for something that developed which was beyond my control. However, I am responsible for the things that I do or do not do, because of this struggle. Like any other sinner, I stand in need of God's grace. By His power and love--much of which has come by means of people who have loved Him, and shared that love with me--I have been changed, and I am changing from glory into glory. I am living proof that God can, and does, overcome all things.